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ABSTRACT

A study examined the effectiveness of a literature based reading strategy used in a Chapter 1 setting, using a series of books with a familiar character. Subjects, 36 third-grade students in a Chapter 1 reading program at 5 different schools representing a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, were divided into control and experimental groups both using the "assisted reading strategy" (consisting of neurological impress, reading aloud, retelling of stories, vocabulary development, and creative writing) and a literature based reading program. Subjects in the experimental group used the "Curious George" series of books. The instruction lasted for 30 thirty-minute sessions. Pre- and posttest consisted of the Gates MacGinitie Form C Reading Comprehension test, the Slosson Word Recognition Test, and the Botel Word Opposites. Results indicated that all students made considerable gains but that students in the experimental group did not do significantly better than those in the control group. Findings suggest that using a connected series of books may enhance interest and enthusiasm but will not necessarily accelerate student progress. (RS)

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DOES A CONNECTED SERIES MAKE A DIFFERENCE ?

CURIOUS GEORGE REVISITED !

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Does a Connected Series make a Difference ?
Curious George Revisited !

INTRODUCTION:

This study describes a literature based reading strategy used in a Chapter 1 setting, using a series of books with a familiar character.

Studies have shown that literature based reading programs provide students with a high level of motivation and interest. Eldredge and Butterfield (1986) found that using children's literature to teach children to read had a positive effect upon student achievement and attitudes. Research has also indicated that New Zealand's Literature based Shared Book Experience has yielded positive results (Mabbitt 1990). These results have also been confirmed by the Ohio Reading Recovery Program (Boehnlein 1987).

While few would dispute the efficacy of using a literature based reading program, the best manner in which to present it is still an areas on which few agree.

According to Carbo (1976) use of tape recorded books will increase vocabulary knowledge and comprehension. Rowe (1989) found that a regular program of reading aloud to students, increased

their scores on both vocabulary and comprehension. Eldredge (1988), reported that Rod Heckelman's Neurological Impress Method (assisted reading), yielded significant increases in student achievement. The retelling of stories as a strategy to improve comprehension was found by Morrow (1985) to also improved students scores. How then does one choose a strategy that will best suit the needs of groups of students who are participants in the Chapter 1 Reading Program ? Richek and McTague (1988) found that using an assisted reading strategy with a motivating series of children's books increased the performance of remedial readers. Those authors chose the Curious George series, and used this strategy with 2nd and 3rd grade Chapter 1 students.

For the purpose of this study we choose to replicate the Richek and McTague study of 1988, with some modifications. However, our main thrust was to examine the validity of using a series of popular children's books with a predictable character in order to increase student performance. According to Crafton (1983) reading a connected series of children's books can increase reading development, because it provides a group of conceptually related materials.

On examination we found that the "assisted reading technique" as used by Richek and McTague contained the following components:

1. Neurological Impress,
2. Reading Aloud,
3. Retelling of stories,
4. Vocabulary development and
5. Creative Writing.

IMPLEMENTATION:

We used the Curious George series with 18 - 3rd grade students who were participants in the Chapter 1 reading program. These students were located in five different schools, thus providing not only a variety of settings, but also a range of students from a varied socio-economic background. The control group also consisted of 18 - 3rd grade students in the Chapter 1 Reading program, located in the same five schools.

The teacher of the control groups continued to teach using a literature based reading program. However, a series of books with a recurring main character was not utilized.

The assisted reading strategy was the basis of instruction for the teaching of thirty - 30 minute sessions with the 3rd grade students. Before the

strategy was employed, all the students in the experimental and control groups were pretested with the following tests:

1. Gates McGinitie. Form C. Comprehension.
2. Slosson Word Recognition Test.
3. Botel Word Opposites.

The schedule followed by each teacher of the experimental group consisted of:

WEEK 1:

DAY 1: Teacher began by introducing the book "Curious George", and reading it to the students. After the book was read, the students were then asked to read pages 1-16 with the teacher using the assisted reading techniques. (In assisted reading the teacher lead the students in choral reading of the pages, by reading with them. The reading was co-ordinated by the teacher hesitating at suitable spots from time to time, allowing the students to supply easier words. As the reading progressed the teacher allowed the students to lead the reading, temporarily taking over when students stumbled). After the students choose 5 words from the pages read, these words were recorded on Curious George cards. Each student then took home their word cards and a copy of "Curious George".

DAY 2: On the second day students shared their

cards with the group, by reading their words and using them correctly in oral sentences.
The students and teacher read p17-32 in an assisted manner. Finally, students chose 5 new words to practice, and took a copy of the book home.
DAY 3: Pages 33-48 of "Curious George" were read using the same strategy. This completed the reading of the book.
DAY 4: Students retold their version of "Curious George" while the teacher wrote it down. The main parts of the story were then illustrated.
DAY 5: Teacher and students reviewed and edited their version of "Curious George".
DAY 6 - 30: During these reading sessions the teacher continued to use the assisted reading strategy to work through other Curious George books:

CURIOUS GEORGE GOES TO THE HOSPITAL.
CURIOUS GEORGE WINS A MEDAL.
CURIOUS GEORGE GETS A PIZZA.
CURIOUS GEORGE GOES TO THE CIRCUS.
CURIOUS GEORGE GOES SLEDDING.
CURIOUS GEORGE GOES TO THE AQUARIUM.
CURIOUS GEORGE RIDES A BIKE.
CURIOUS GEORGE FLIES A KITE.

As the students progressed from session 1 to the final "Curious George" session, many changes took place. Among these changes or adjustments were increased writing activities. The students began by adding an extra incident in the sequence of a story. From this they advanced to writing their own stories about curious animals. As a group, an original "Curious George" adventure was written based on a Christmas theme.

In one school each of the students read a "Curious George" book to designated Kindergarten groups. This practice of reading to the Kindergartner students has continued at this school, providing much reading practice and pleasure to all the students involved.

It was found that the students advanced from requiring "assisted reading" and practice on vocabulary words, to being able to independently read the "Curious George" books as they were introduced.

After 30 teaching sessions, students in both the control and the experimental groups were post-tested using:

1. Gates McGinitie. Level C. Comprehension.
2. Slosson Word Recognition Test.
3. Botel Word Opposites.

RESULTS:

Although students in the experimental and control group made considerable gains, results of statistical analysis showed that Curious George students did NOT do significantly better than the control group (at the .05 level of significance) in reading comprehension and word recognition. These results were obtained using the Spearman analysis of covariance.

CONCLUSIONS:

While the students in the experimental group made gains in all areas of reading, it may be concluded that this was probably the result of using the assisted reading method used rather than the use of a connected series of books.

Students in the control group also made gains in comprehension and word recognition, while using a variety of books in a literature based program.

One may then conclude that using a literature based reading program does result in increased reading skills. Using a connected series of books may enhance interest and enthusiasm, but will not necessarily accelerate student progress.

However, it was found that while the connected series of books were used, students were very involved in the adventures of the main character.

Students appeared to enjoy sharing their word cards, their predictions about Curious George's next adventure, and writing about Curious George. It was also observed that students demonstrated confidence and a willingness to take risks when presented with writing activities. A connected series with a familiar and predictable character establishes a pattern of background knowledge from which the remedial student can draw.

Many of the students expressed their pleasure at being able to bring a book home to share with their parents. It was found that students continued this habit of taking books home even when the Curious George series was concluded.

Richek and McTague tentatively concluded that the "Curious George" strategy is effective when used for 18 days in a school situation." As we used the strategy for 30 days perhaps the impact was not quite as effective as it would have been over a shorter period of time. Therefore, we do not entirely disagree with the claim that using a connecting series of books will increase students' reading skills. Nevertheless, we felt that using a literature based reading program in the Chapter 1 situation, rather than a connected series will produce similar results.

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